

Live: Government will have to buy electric cars and build green buildings as it declares climate change emergency

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ROBERT KITCHIN/STUFF

Jacinda Ardern received a standing ovation from her Labour caucus after delivering the motion.

As it declares a climate change emergency the Government is promising to clean up its own house with all Government buildings going green and new cars going electric by 2025.

This promise is not backed by any new funding however, and huge swaths of Government buildings such as state houses and schools are only included "in principle".

The climate change emergency declaration was made by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and joins New Zealand to 32 other countries who have declared a climate change emergency.

The motion includes a promise to make the public sector carbon-neutral by 2025.

"The public sector needs to be and will be an exemplar that sets the standard we all need to achieve by 2050," Ardern said.

All Government departments and ministries will be required to measure their emissions and offset the ones they cannot remove by 2025.

New buildings for Government offices will need to meet a 5-star green rating while new leases will need to meet a 4-star rating.

Agencies will be required to "optimise" their car fleet with a reduction of vehicles and electric vehicles being preferred for new vehicles, or hybrids where electric vehicles are not appropriate.

However the vast majority of the buildings the Government owns are only required to go carbon-neutral if it is deemed feasible.

School boards of trustees and Kainga Ora, who manage the Government's tens of thousands of state houses, are only included "in principle" - with reports on the feasibility of the goal expected.

There is some money to help with decarbonisation – the already-announced \$200m public sector decarbonisation fund.

There was a push for a climate change emergency declaration during the last term, but this was stymied by NZ First.

The motion itself will have no practical effect on laws or the running of the country, but would instead symbolically signal that the Government saw climate change as an emergency.

National MP Stuart Smith said National would not support the declaration as it was “virtue signalling” and not effective.

It notes the “alarming trend in species decline”.

Emissions are projected to increase in coming years, but did drop by one per cent in the first year of the Labour-led Government in 2018.

Climate change minister James Shaw passed the Zero Carbon Bill during the last term, an overarching new system for setting emissions reductions targets that created an independent Climate Change Commission, which would itself recommend carbon budgets for Governments to reach those targets.

He failed to get agriculture, one of New Zealand’s largest emitters, into the Emissions Trading Scheme, although the sector will enter the scheme by default in 2025 if another system for pricing the cost of emissions is not created.

Shaw also failed to seriously shift the dial on transport emissions, as NZ First stopped the proposed “feebate” scheme and vehicle emission standard.

The declaration is likely to happen not long after Question Time on Wednesday afternoon.

When a declaration was first mooted last term Ardern said she supported one, but didn't place huge weight on its importance.

"I don't see why there should be any reason why members of Parliament wouldn't want to demonstrate that this is a matter of urgency," Ardern said.

"The one thing I think we need to make really clear, though, [is that] a declaration in Parliament doesn't change our direction of travel. It's what we invest in and it's the laws that we pass that make the big difference, and on those grounds I think we are making good, solid progress."

ACT leader David Seymour said declaring an emergency would be a "marketing stunt".

"This is a marketing stunt that won't stop one tonne of emissions. If you've got a policy, you don't need to declare an emergency. If you have to declare an emergency, maybe your policy isn't working," Seymour said.